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Investigating the Relationship Between Adolescents' Interpersonal Problem-Solving Skills and Developmental Guidance Needs

Muhammed Akat

Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Turkey, muhammedakat@kmu.edu.tr

Adem Peker

Atatürk University, Turkey, adem.peker@atauni.edu.tr

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Cover Page Footnote

This study was produced from the first author's master's thesis "Investigating the relationship between adolescents' interpersonal problem solving skills and developmental guidance needs" under the supervision of the second author.

Investigating the Relationship between Adolescents' Interpersonal Problem-Solving Skills and Developmental Guidance Needs*

Muhammed Akat

Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Turkey

Adem Peker

Atatürk University, Turkey

Introduction

Every individual struggles with many personal, interpersonal, educational, physical, and psychological problems. These problems can include conflicts in interpersonal relationships, developmental difficulties, lack of course success, and indecision in the selection of professions (Arslan et al., 2010; Kesici et al., 2007; Peker & Kaygusuz, 2009; Türkmen et al., 2016). Problems, which are a fact of life, are inevitable for people of all ages, requiring us to seek ways to solve them effectively (Nguyen Cong & Nguyen Thi My, 2020). Nevertheless, the developmental problems of adolescence might cause adolescents to have more difficulty than other age groups in solving their problems. Struggling with these challenges can lead to their spending a significant portion of their time and energy on problem solving (Peker, 2008).

The problems on which adolescents spend their time and energy include their efforts to adapt to their developmental period. The development of the reproductive system, change in the voice, acne, identity development, and the creation of unique values might cause psychological adaptation problems (Karataş & Sönmez, 2019). Accepting changes in physical characteristics can sometimes be a problem for adolescents (Markey, 2010). Another source of problems during adolescence is the choice of profession. Scholars have observed issues such as indecision on occupation, lack of information about an occupation, and a lack of knowledge of the resources to be used while choosing an occupation (Kesici et al., 2007). Adolescents might also experience problems in the educational field from time to time, such

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as effective study techniques, effective use of time, coping with exam anxiety, preparation for the university exam, and attending class (Tagay & Savi Çakar, 2017).

Scholars have noted physiological, occupational, educational, and physical problems during adolescence, as well as problems in interpersonal relationships. When adolescents cannot establish their identity in social groups or cannot adapt to the group, they feel lonely and may display social withdrawal behaviors (Topses, 2003). Furthermore, adolescents might have problems with their peers at or outside school (Carlisle, 2011). They may also experience problems with the opposite gender during this period when romantic relationships are intense (Goncy et al., 2020). In addition, adolescents can have problems with parents at home, as well as with teachers and administrators at school.

During adolescence, students might seek solutions to the problems they face. Although adolescents sometimes try to obtain the help they need from their peers and families, school counselors, who are trained to help with adolescent problems, can offer professional assistance. School counselors can provide professional support to students on issues such as how to deal with stressful and challenging life events, how to use their personal characteristics to overcome problem situations, and what strategies they can use to solve the problems they face in their daily lives (Heppner et al., 2004). This kind of assistance that school counselors provide to students can generally be expressed as help with problem-solving skills. Problem-solving skills have a crucial role in solving adolescents' developmental problems (Kasik et al., 2017). In addition, students can more easily solve their interpersonal problems with the social problem-solving skills fostered by school psychological counselors (Merrill et al., 2017). This suggests that adolescents' ability of to solve interpersonal problems is a crucial variable in terms of developmental guidance needs. Therefore, scholars and stakeholders need to address adolescents' developmental guidance needs together with the ability to solve interpersonal problems. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the extent to which adolescents' interpersonal problem-solving approaches predict their developmental guidance needs. For this general purpose, the researchers sought solutions to the following problems and sub-problems:

Among the interpersonal problem-solving approaches of adolescents,

- a. Does approaching problems in a negative way significantly predict their developmental guidance needs?
- b. Does the insistent-persevering approach significantly predict their developmental guidance needs?
- c. Does the lack of self-confidence approach significantly predict their developmental guidance needs?
- d. Does the constructive problem-solving approach significantly predict their developmental guidance needs?
- e. Does the unwillingness to take responsibility approach significantly predict their developmental guidance needs?

Literature Review

Problems of Adolescents

Researchers have observed that the problems of adolescents have increased, as is the case with people of all age groups, due to factors such as changing social structure, technological

developments, changing educational expectations, and difficult living conditions in our age (Yeşilyaprak, 2009). Along with the problems adolescents face, there are developmental tasks that they must fulfill. These include personal, educational, and occupational tasks. The personal area includes developmental assignments such as realizing and accepting their personal characteristics, having self-esteem and self-confidence, being harmonious and balanced in their interpersonal relationships, and being aware of their strengths and weaknesses. In the field of education, learning at its core means learning how to learn, but it also involves developmental tasks such as using an effective study method, using time efficiently, being motivated for exams, and coping with stress in educational subjects. Finally, in the professional field, they have to perform tasks such as succeeding in the choice of their future professions, knowing the characteristics of occupations, realizing their potential, and learning how to access the profession they want (Chen et al., 2020; Dhami & Sharma, 2020). These developmental challenges can also become problems for adolescents.

Problems seen during adolescence might lead to psychological problems in students. For instance, Neill et al. (2020) found that depression, anxiety, and stress are common in adolescents. In a similar study, Liu et al. (2020) observed body dissatisfaction and smartphone addiction in adolescents. In addition, other studies have shown that psychological negatives such as depression, anxiety, school bullying, and school abandonment are widely encountered in adolescents (Eraslan Çapan & Bakioğlu, 2020; Fond et al., 2019; Hicks et al., 2018; Malak & Khalifeh, 2017). All these results show that adolescents struggle not only with developmental problems but also with psychological disorders.

The difficulties and developmental tasks found in adolescence provide the basis for the need for guidance services in adolescents. In fact, many studies have been conducted to determine in which field students need guidance services during adolescence. These studies reveal that adolescents need guidance emotionally, socially (Dogar et al., 2011); occupationally (Loc et al., 2020); in human relationships, career development, personal development, social values, and learning skills (Germeijs et al., 2006; Janetius & Ahammed, 2017; LeBlanc et al., 2011; Nyutu & Gybers, 2008; Coker et al., 2014); and in career (Zhang et al., 2019), physical, psychological (Dhami & Sharma, 2019), mental health, and legal areas (Myers et al., 2017).

One of the skill sets adolescents must have to reduce the developmental and psychological problems they face and the guidance services they need is interpersonal problem-solving skills. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2015) states that adolescents need life skills and competencies to protect their health and well-being in the face of difficulties. They include interpersonal relationship skills as one category of these life skills. As the WHO (2015) states, adolescents must have interpersonal problem-solving skills so that they can live a healthy life. However, not every student in high school has the ability to solve problems between people, and they need guidance on this issue. Adolescents' developmental guidance needs are due not only to the developmental difficulties of adolescence but also to the lack of interpersonal problem-solving skills. Many studies have stated that interpersonal problem-solving skills are a precondition for individuals' emotional and psychological health and thus reduce their need for guidance (Gotlib & Asarnow, 1979; Kuperminc & Allen, 2001; Tisdelle & Lawrence, 1988). Studies have shown that adolescents' interpersonal problem-solving skills comprise one of the important variables affecting the guidance services they need.

How Guidance Services Are Implemented in Schools

Today, the developmental guidance model is used in schools when the guidance services that students need are executed through individual or group activities. School counselors also follow a guidance model while providing adolescents with assistance for performing the guidance activities they need in other areas. The developmental guidance model aims to improve students' potential and support their personal development (Myrick, 2011). While many guidance models have been used, given the developmental and interpersonal problems seen in students and the competencies that students should have, the developmental guidance model is arguably more beneficial. The developmental guidance model puts the implementation of various activities by school psychological counselors into a plan to effectively solve students' developmental problems (Myrick, 2011).

The way the developmental guidance model is implemented in schools is finalized through a comprehensive psychological counseling and guidance (PCG) program. The comprehensive PCG program provides a collaborative and planned execution of guidance services in schools in line with the general principles and objectives of the developmental guidance model (Gybers & Henderson, 2012). Furthermore, the comprehensive PCG program has identified areas where students should gain proficiency by the developmental guidance model. These areas include school and environment compliance, educational achievement, educational and professional development, self-acceptance, interpersonal relationships, and a safe and healthy life with family and society. Considering the problems that adolescents face today, and given the competence areas in the comprehensive PCG program, adolescents can easily solve their problems with the help of guidance services. Through counseling services, students can acquire the competencies specified in the comprehensive PCG program.

With guidance activities carried out following the comprehensive school counseling program, adolescents will be able to effectively solve both developmental and interpersonal problems. This will ensure that they have a healthy developmental period and are more resistant to future developmental difficulties. Thus, adolescents' problem-solving ability is important not only in terms of adolescence but also because it affects their whole life.

Method

Research Design and Participants

In this study, we examined the relationships between adolescents' interpersonal problem-solving approaches and their developmental guidance needs. Thus, the research was designed as a correlational survey model. This study's population consisted of a total of 9,765 high school students in ninth through twelfth grades in schools of the Ministry of Education in the city center of Karaman, Turkey, in the 2019–2020 academic year. The participants were determined by the proportionate stratified sampling method, which is a random sampling method. While determining the participating group of the research, the school type variable was determined as the basic layer. The final sample consisted of 1,002 (38.32% female, 61.68% male) high school students.

Instruments

Personal Information Form

With this form, the researchers obtained personal information from the participants. Participants answered questions about grade level, gender, and school type.

Interpersonal Problem Solving Inventory (IPSI)

This inventory was developed by Çam and Tümkaya (2007) to determine individuals' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors when they face interpersonal problems. They developed the inventory with 526 university students. The validity and reliability for high school students was verified by Çam and Tümkaya (2008) with 482 high school students. The inventory, consisting of a total of 50 items, has the following five sub-dimensions: insistent-persevering approach, approaching problems in a negative way, unwillingness to take responsibility, constructive problem solving, and lack of self-confidence. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency values for the sub-dimensions ranged from .67 to .89. Among the sub-dimensions of the inventory, in the constructive problem-solving approach, when an individual encounters a problem in their interpersonal relationships, they experience thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that can healthily solve the problem, and they strive to solve the problem. In the lack of self-confidence approach, the individual believes that when they encounter an interpersonal problem, they will not solve it. In this approach, one perceives oneself as incompetent in the face of the problem. Individuals who use the unwillingness to take responsibility approach do not struggle to solve a problem that they have to overcome in their interpersonal relationships. Rather, they wait for other people to solve the problem. When using the insistent-persevering approach in interpersonal relations, the individual confidently faces the problem and constantly tries to solve the problem regardless of how difficult it is. Finally, when negatively approaching problems, the individual has negative feelings and thoughts, such as desperation, sadness, and inadequacies, when struggling with a problem in their interpersonal relations.

Adolescents' Guidance Needs Determination Scale (AGNDS)

This scale, developed by Akat and Peker (2020), is used to determine adolescents' developmental guidance needs. The AGNDS uses a 5-point Likert scale and has five sub-dimensions: educational success, preparation for the university exam, educational and professional development, interpersonal relations, and self-expression. The lowest score on the scale is 21, and the highest is 105. The AGNDS can be used both with five factors and as a single dimension. In this study, the scale was evaluated by taking the total score. High scores obtained from both the total score and the sub-dimensions of the scale indicate that students' guidance needs are high. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the AGNDS varied between .72 and .79 for the sub-dimensions. The McDonald's general reliability coefficient ranged between .70 and .91 for the sub-dimensions.

Data Analysis

Before analyzing the problems of the research, we examined the data for normal distribution. The skewness (-.12 and .33) and kurtosis (-.39 and .11) values were calculated for the normality distribution of the data. We determined that the skewness and kurtosis values met the assumption of normality. Multiple linear regression was used for analysis in the study. The analyses were carried out using SPSS 22.00.

Ethical Procedures

An informed consent form including the general purpose of the study, a statement that participation was voluntary, and the contact addresses of the researchers was given to the students during the application. Ethical permission for the research was obtained from the Atatürk University Educational Sciences Ethics Committee on February 14, 2020. The necessary permission for data collection was obtained from the Karaman Directorate of

National Education. All procedures in human studies were carried out according to the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its subsequent amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Results

Table 1 shows the relationships between adolescents' developmental guidance needs and interpersonal problem solving.

Table 1

Relationships between Adolescents' Developmental Counseling Needs and Interpersonal Problem Solving

Variables	IPSI	Approaching problems in a negative way	Constructive problem-solving	Lack of self-confidence	Unwillingness to take responsibility	Insistent-persevering approach
IPSI	1	.32*	-.12*	.32*	.13*	-.17*

* $p < .05$

Table 1 shows a positive and low significant relationship between adolescents' developmental counseling needs and unwillingness to take responsibility ($r = .13, p < .05$) as well as a positive moderate significant relationship of counseling needs with approaching problems in a negative way and lack of self-confidence ($r = .32, .32$, respectively, $p < .05$). There were negative and low significant relationships between participants' developmental guidance needs and the constructive problem-solving and insistent-persevering approaches ($r = -.12, -.17$, respectively, $p < .05$).

Table 2 displays the results of multiple linear regression analysis regarding whether interpersonal problem-solving approaches predict adolescents' developmental guidance needs.

Table 2

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results Related to the Prediction of Adolescents' Developmental Guidance Needs by Interpersonal Problem-Solving Approaches

	Predictor Variables	B	S.E	Beta	t	p	R ²
1	(Constant)	43.05	1.35		31.71	.01	10.2
	APNW	.31	.03	.320	10.67	.01	
2	(Constant)	54.08	1.88		28.74	.01	5.6
	APNW	.36	.03	.369	12.46	.01	
	IPA	-.67	.08	-.243	-8.19	.01	
3	(Constant)	51.51	1.92		26.88	.01	2.4
	APNW	.25	.04	.258	7.20	.01	
	IPA	-.65	.08	-.236	-8.06	.01	
	LS	.42	.08	.190	5.41	.01	
4	(Constant)	53.31	2.04		26.12	.01	.05
	APNW	.26	.04	.268	7.47	.01	
	IPA	-.49	.10	-.178	-4.82	.01	
	LS	.41	.08	.189	5.40	.01	
	CPS	-.11	.04	-.094	-2.51	.01	

Dependent Variable: Adolescents' developmental guidance needs

APNW: Approaching problems in a negative way

IPA: Insistent-persevering approach

LS: Lack of self-esteem

CPS: Constructive problem solving

1st Model: R²=10,2, F₍₁₋₁₀₀₁₎ =113.39; 2nd Model: R²=5,6, F₍₂₋₉₉₉₎ =94.25; 3rd Model: R²=2,4, F₍₃₋₉₉₈₎ =74.36; 4th Model: R²=0,05, F₍₄₋₉₉₇₎ =57.65; $p < .05$

As Table 2 indicates, the constructive problem-solving and insistent-persevering approaches negatively and significantly predicted the developmental guidance needs of adolescents. Also, the approaching problems negatively and lack of self-confidence approaches predicted developmental guidance needs in a positive and significant way.

According to the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, in the first stage, approaching problems in a negative way explained 10.2% of participants' developmental guidance needs. In the second stage, the insistent-persevering approach explained 5.6% of developmental guidance needs, and in the third stage, the lack of self-confidence approach explained 2.4% of the adolescents' developmental guidance needs. In the fourth stage, constructive problem solving explained .05% of the developmental guidance needs of adolescents. In total, interpersonal problem solving predicted 18.8% of adolescents' developmental guidance needs.

Table 3*Variables that Did Not Predict Adolescents' Need for Developmental Guidance*

Non-Predictive Variable	Beta	t	p
Unwillingness to take responsibility	-.044	-1.31	.19

Table 3 reveals that the unwillingness to take responsibility sub-dimension of interpersonal problem-solving approaches did not significantly predict developmental guidance needs ($t = -1.31$; $p > .05$).

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

In this study, we concluded that the negative approach to solving interpersonal problems predicted the developmental guidance needs of adolescents in a positive, low-level, and significant way. The literature indicates that students with low problem-solving skills need guidance services (Bulut Serin & Derin, 2008; Yalım Yaman, 2014; Yıldırım et al., 2011). Dimmitt and Wilkerson (2012) emphasize that high school students whose developmental guidance needs are met might experience fewer problems in their interpersonal relationships. Tuchili and Ndhlovu (2016) reveal in their study with university students that students who received psychological counseling and guidance services had better interpersonal relationships and problem-solving skills than those who did not. In addition, Ergin and Dağ (2013) and Koç et al. (2015) found that a negative approach to a problem could increase the need for guidance. Bedel (2015) found that there was a significant positive relationship between approaching problems negatively and negative emotions and anxiety.

Çam and Tümkaya (2008) found that university students who applied for psychological support received higher scores in the approaching problems in a negative way sub-dimension than others. This result corresponds with the result of the current research. However, Rodriguez-Fornells and Maydeu-Olivares (2000) state, in their study with high school students, that there was no relationship between students' negative approach to a problem and their educational guidance needs based on their high school grades.

The positive prediction of developmental counseling needs by a negative approach to interpersonal problem-solving can be addressed according to the developmental guidance model. In compliance with the developmental guidance model, individuals' positive characteristics and strengths should be developed. Therefore, when problems are encountered, focusing on the positive characteristics of the individual and the situation instead of on the negativities can lead to more beneficial results (O'Connor, 2018). Consequently, it can be said that approaching problems negatively might increase developmental guidance needs. Thus, students who try to solve a problem with a negative approach can be provided with therapeutic guidance services to solve these problems. For instance, in the classroom, students are asked about the characteristics of someone who solves their interpersonal problems effectively. In this way, teachers can raise awareness of effective problem-solving methods. However, individual psychological counseling services can also be provided to students who constantly approach problems in a negative way.

This study concluded that the insistent-persevering approach predicted adolescents' developmental guidance needs in a negative, low-level, and significant way. Bedel (2015) found a negative relationship between the insistent-persevering approach and negative emotion. This result means that increasing the level of using an insistent-persevering approach reduces negative emotions in adolescents. In this case, it can be said that adolescents' use of this approach decreases their guidance needs. Becker-Weidman et al. (2010) examined the relationship between interpersonal problem solving and psychological negativity in adolescents, finding a positive relationship between the avoidance of interpersonal problem-solving methods and psychological negativity. Thus, adolescents who adopt the unwillingness to take responsibility approach might need more guidance in their personal and interpersonal relationships. In the insistent-persevering approach, the aim is to persist with and solve the problem, in contrast to the unwillingness to take responsibility approach. For this reason, it can be stated that adolescents who use the insistent-persevering method of solving interpersonal problems might need less guidance.

In this study, the effect of the insistent-persevering approach on adolescents' developmental guidance needs can be explained by adolescents' obligation to cope with many developmental and interpersonal problems during adolescence. Various interpersonal problems experienced throughout adolescence might not be solved easily, and such problems might require perseverance. In this period, adolescents' persistent and patient attitudes toward the problems they encounter might lead to the solution of the problems. Effective problem solving might cause adolescents to need fewer guidance services.

In this study, we concluded that the lack of self-confidence approach predicted the developmental guidance needs of adolescents in a positive, low, and significant way. Parallel to this conclusion, Ergin and Dağ (2013) examined the relationships between interpersonal problem solving and psychological problems among university students. They found a positive relationship between using a self-confidence method to solve interpersonal problems and various psychological problems.

Koç et al. (2015) examined the relationship between interpersonal problem-solving skills and communication skills, finding a negative correlation between the scores in the self-confidence sub-dimension and the scores obtained from the communication skills scale. Thus, the participants in the study might need guidance in areas such as interpersonal relationships and self-expression. The current findings correspond with the findings of these studies.

The finding obtained in this study that the lack of self-confidence approach positively predicted developmental guidance needs can be discussed and explained in terms of developmental guidance. Numerous problems can be seen due to the developmental characteristics of adolescence (American School Counselor Association, 2019). However, whether these problems cause the need for developmental guidance in adolescents will depend on an individual's perspective on the problem. According to the developmental counseling model, while these problems originating from the developmental period are considered a natural process, students should emphasize their potential and strong characteristics. In this way, while students can solve their problems, trying to cope with problems in an insecure way can make problem solving difficult in adolescents and increase the need for developmental guidance (Lapan et al., 2001). In schools, progressive guidance services can be offered to students who use the lack of self-confidence approach. Through school-established psycho-education groups, these students can gain the ability to realize their potential, to gain effective communication skills, to become aware of their feelings and

thoughts, and to solve the problems they experience in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, if there are students with problems with most social relationships in their lives due to their lack of self-confidence, they may benefit from individual psychological counseling.

Another finding of this study is that the constructive problem-solving approach predicted the developmental guidance needs of adolescents in a negative, low, and significant way. The literature shows that constructive problem solving has a protective effect against perceived stress levels in high school students and thus reduces the need for personal guidance services (Bedel & Küçükköse, 2014). Yıldız and Eşkisü (2011) developed a guidance program considering the personal, social, and professional problems of high school students, determining that counseling services aimed at developing problem-solving skills could positively affect students' academic, emotional, and social development. In other words, problem-solving skills used positively will decrease the guidance needs of high school students. The results obtained by Bedel and Küçükköse (2014) and Yıldız and Eşkisü (2011) are similar to the findings of this study.

In this study, the negative and low-level prediction of the developmental guidance needs of adolescents by the constructive problem-solving approach might be due to the individuals' solving of the problems encountered in adolescence. There are many problems in personal educational, professional, and social areas during adolescence (Ringdal et al., 2020; WHO, 2015). Solving these problems may reduce adolescents' developmental guidance needs. Students who can constructively solve problems in their interpersonal relationships can take on the role of peer mediators. Their peers, who cannot effectively solve problems in their interpersonal relationships, can receive help from students in this group. In this way, the positive experiences of the students in the group are enhanced, and other students will have received help in solving their problems.

Finally, in this study, we concluded that the interpersonal problem-solving approach of unwillingness to take responsibility did not significantly predict adolescents' developmental guidance needs. In contrast to this finding, literature has shown that not taking responsibility can increase the need for guidance. Jaffe and D'Zurilla (2009) found a positive relationship in adolescents between the unwillingness to take responsibility (avoidant) approach and hopeless, reactive, anxiety-sensitive personality traits. Jaffe and D'Zurilla (2009) emphasize that individuals who use the avoidant problem-solving approach have negative personality traits. Negative personality traits might lead to problems in adolescents' personal and interpersonal relationships and increase the need for guidance. In Turkey, Çam and Tümkaya's (2008) study on individuals using the avoidant approach showed that their counseling and guidance needs were higher. Both studies' findings contrast with the findings of this study. Belzer et al. (2002), in their study with university students, found that individuals using the avoidant approach to interpersonal problem-solving were positively associated with psychological problems. As a result of this study, one can argue that students who use the avoidant approach method need more guidance in personal and interpersonal areas.

We suggest that the unwillingness to take responsibility sub-dimension of interpersonal problem-solving approaches does not predict adolescents' developmental guidance needs and that both interpersonal and other problems in adolescence can be solved depending on time. However, these problems may also increase with time. Therefore, not taking responsibility might not significantly predict adolescents' developmental guidance needs.

Muhammed Akat is a research assistant of psychological counseling and guidance at the Faculty of Education, Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Karaman, Turkey. His research interests include psychological counseling and guidance, developmental psychology, educational psychology, and problematic internet and social media use.

Adem Peker is an associate professor of psychological counseling and guidance at the Faculty of Education, Atatürk University, Erzurum, Turkey. He holds a PhD in psychological counseling and guidance from Sakarya University. His research interests include psychological counseling and guidance, developmental psychology, educational psychology, cyber bullying, and cyber victimization.

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